



Riding herd on new federal projects, Sampson aims for savings.

GSA's Arthur Sampson breaks trails for federal building

Most government officials would object strenuously to being called hucksters or pitchmen. But not Arthur F. Sampson.

The commissioner of the General Services Administration's (GSA) Public Buildings Service (PBS) smiles and nods at the characterization. His unconcern is a vital part of his style, and style is a vital part of his approach to managing this mammoth \$1-billion-a-year federal construction and property management agency.

Sampson is using this style to revitalize PBS, long-saddled with the reputation of being one of the government's stodgiest units, through a combination of supersalesmanship, personal flamboyance, modern management, hard work and new, or untried federal building contracting techniques. Although some of these procedures are causing reverberations throughout the industry, Sampson continues to labor hard for their acceptance by meeting with and addressing industry groups at every opportunity in hopes of gaining converts.

In his two years at the helm, Sampson, who now has his eye on GSA's top job, has probably implemented more new construction and operating approaches than

year ago to put into action. Among these are:

- Construction manager contracts for two major projects, with a third expected shortly (ENR 12/23/71 p.12).
- Turnkey construction on a small, experimental scale for five district Social Security office buildings in Illinois and Wisconsin.
- A systems package proposal based on office building performance standards for three large Social Security payment centers in San Francisco, Philadelphia and Chicago (ENR 11/25/71 p.35).
- Proposed legislation to finance public buildings through a fund sustained by rents charged federal agencies occupying GSA space, and to permit construction of already designed buildings under rent-purchase agreements with private developers.
- Integration of a revolutionary fire-safety system into all new federal high-rise buildings with a Seattle building, now under construction, to serve as a prototype.

- A prescribed policy of locating federal building projects in areas where they will do the most socio-economic good, with a leaning toward low-income sections in central cities.

- The use of permanent project man-

agers on major projects with authority to make major decisions and who remain on the job.

Besides riding herd over such major changes, all accomplished within a year, Sampson has found time to serve as a member of the Administration's Interagency Committee on Construction, Task Force on Minority Enterprise, Cabinet Committee on Construction, Committee on Seasonality in Construction, and the National Planning Commission.

Management changes inevitable. By far the most controversial of Sampson's innovations has been the hiring of a construction manager (CM) for major projects, a technique that Sampson says may be extended to smaller jobs for firms that want to develop this type of consulting expertise.

For a management fee, the CM provides consulting services relating to engineering, budgeting, scheduling, contract awards and labor relations. Some general contractors, which feel they could be displaced in this procedure by multidisciplinary A-E firms and design-construct firms, have been assured by Sampson that they will be given fair consideration for such contracts, provided they have the capabilities.

Aided in implementing the CM program by PBS assistant commissioner of construction management Walter A. Meisen, Sampson has awarded two major CM contracts that will permit a CM to oversee and coordinate projects from design to completion.

Sampson agrees that the use of CMs by PBS will prompt changes in the industry's structure, but feels that such changes are long overdue. "The aggregation of roles and resources in construction is inevitable," says Sampson. "The building team composed of cooperating professionals is just the first step in that direction."

In another of his favorite refrains, Sampson contends that the government, as a major customer for construction services, too often gets poor service.

"In the past we would get marginal A-E services," he says. But he warns that GSA will no longer tolerate shoddy construction and design. "We are first-class customers and we demand to be treated like one." This demand led PBS to cancel recently an A-E contract. "The word will get around, and we'll get better service. I want their best people and highest priority on our jobs when contractors or A-Es have a government contract."

Perhaps because some of Sampson's innovations did not set particularly

well with the staff he inherited. 80% of PBS' top staff was replaced in his first year in office.

Sampson stopped granting automatic annual raises to employees, reversing a long-term practice at most federal agencies. He now insists on pay-raise recommendations coming from immediate supervisors before allowing any increases to take effect. He has also added more minorities and women to top PBS positions and reduced the average employee age.

In other management measures, Sampson established rigid chains of command, computerized many office functions and instituted life-cycle project management—the planning and budgeting of a project over its entire useful life, not just its initial cost.

Even with all this management tightening, Sampson has been caught in the embarrassing position of being unable to explain conclusively why the cost of the CM project for three Social Security payment centers, estimated at \$72 million last May, is now pegged by PBS at \$97 million. When he learned of the difference, Sampson immediately called in his top staff for an explanation only to find that no one could adequately account for the drastic revision. While still investigating reasons for the change, Sampson vows it will never happen again.

A man on the move. Despite the controversy stirred by his rapid implementation of new building procedures, Sampson believes he has the credentials to get President Nixon's approval to head the entire GSA, succeeding his long-time friend Robert Kunzig, recently appointed a judge on the U.S. Court of Claims. Sampson's desire to stay with GSA was part of his recent decision to reject an offer to become president of the Philadelphia 1976 Bicentennial Corp. (ENR 11/11/71 p.7) at a reported annual salary of \$80,000. His present job as PBS commissioner pays \$36,000 and the GSA administrator earns \$40,000.

The 45-year-old Sampson says he has support for the top job from several Pennsylvania government officials he formerly worked with, including Kunzig, now his roommate in a Washington bachelor's apartment. On weekends, Sampson commutes to his home in Camp Hill, Pa. Married and a father of four boys, he says he still finds time to be active in community and church affairs.

There is, however, support for other candidates to succeed him, and most of it is coming from officials who



Arthur F. Sampson

A flair for getting things done.

say that Sampson lacks sufficient Washington experience for the job. One leading contender is Rod Kregar, GSA's deputy administrator, who has considerable Capitol Hill support.

No one knows how the competition will go, but Sampson has nevertheless gained considerable respect, if sometimes grudgingly, from the construction industry since coming to Washington in 1969. Even the Associated General Contractors (AGC), which is still skeptical of some management techniques implemented by Sampson, has key spokesmen boosting him for the top job. "We have good rapport with him," says AGC's building division director Campbell Reed. "He listens to us and we recognize that he has a difficult job."

The Consulting Engineers Council (CEC) has officially endorsed Sampson for the top job. "In some ways he's more qualified to head GSA than to be PBS commissioner," says a CEC spokesman who notes that CEC has traditionally favored an architect or engineer as PBS chief. Similar support has come from the American Institute of Architects and the National Society of Professional Engineers.

A University of Rhode Island graduate in business administration with top administrative experience in private and government circles, Sampson may have a head start as a candidate for GSA's top slot. He began in manage-

GSA's Public Buildings Service

- 25,000 employees including 900 professionals.
- A \$1-billion budget.
- Management of 220 million sq ft of building space.
- 10,000 buildings owned or leased.
- 1,500 construction projects under way.
- \$750 million in building contracts in force.

ment at General Electric, serving for 12 years in various financial, manufacturing and purchasing managerial positions. And before joining PBS in 1969, Sampson spent six years in Pennsylvania's state government, first as Secretary of Procurement under Gov. William Scranton (R) and later as Secretary of Administration and Budget for Gov. Raymond Shafer (R). Among the four chief policymakers in Shafer's cabinet, Sampson was responsible for financial, management, personnel administration, systems analysis and budget preparation.

After this state level experience, Sampson first went to GSA's Federal Supply Service for a brief stay and then was assigned to PBS on Dec. 3, 1969, as acting commissioner. The following March he was formally appointed PBS commissioner, assuming responsibility for the work of over 60% of GSA's 40,000 employees.

An ego that motivates. Whether he stays with PBS or gets the GSA job, Sampson has no qualms about his ability to bring out the best in his staff, and has a theory on how it can be done.

For example, he says that until he joined PBS he wore white shirts and his hair short, a sharp contrast to his current patterned shirts, mod wristwatch band, Marco-style suit and sideburns. What prompted this metamorphosis, Sampson says, was an office sadly lacking in spirit.

"I adopt a management style for every situation and what had to be done when I arrived was to raise the esprit de corps. The whole office lacked morale, so the first thing I did was to grow sideburns, wear colorful clothes and have our office doors painted pastel colors." He also began staging sporting and social events for PBS employees.

The purpose of all this, Sampson says, "is to get people swinging together. When you do, productivity goes up. You make people a part of what is going on. Then you insist on a full day's work—and get it willingly."

Sampson's new federal construction approaches are essentially aimed at motivating a similar team response from members of the construction industry, presuming its leaders have a similar secret of success that Sampson enjoys revealing.

A summer intern at PBS was quizzing Sampson before departing for another year at school and asked why Sampson, as an accountant and finance expert, thought he could run a giant federal agency. "I told him it takes a bigger ego and I have one."